

from our viewpoint...

City steps forward, asks voters support

Less than a month from now, citizens of Goodland will be voting on whether to raise the city sales tax a penny to pay for a \$12 million project to rebuild key city streets and the main roads connecting the county and city.

Five months ago, city and county commissioners began looking at the joint project, and at first blush it seemed the thing to do was ask the state Legislature for permission to have all county citizens vote on a countywide 1 percent sales tax.

Two things happened to change that original plan, and to move the sales tax issue to a top priority. The major change was the announcement of the development of the Goodland Energy Center, with the anticipated construction of a power plant, ethanol plant and biodiesel plant west of town next year. That announcement in July added pressure to get the road project moving. A bond lawyer from Gilmore and Bell told county commissioners it could take more than a year to go through the Legislature for the countywide sales tax. He felt, and the county commissioners agreed, it would be more efficient to go with the city sales tax instead.

The city commission has taken the major step, authorizing a special election on Oct. 18. The ballot will ask the citizens to approve a 1 percent sales tax to fix the roads. The tax will remain in place until the roads are fixed and the bonds paid off.

That means the citizens of Goodland will be the ones voting and deciding if the entire road project goes forward.

City commissioners are fond of saying the city's citizens are also citizens of Sherman County. The joint road projects is to be paid for with the increased sales tax to be collected on sales made in the city. What makes this possible is that 90 percent of the sales tax collected in Sherman County is collected within the city limits of Goodland, and nearly everyone who lives in Sherman County spends money in the city and pays part of the current sales tax.

The current 1 percent countywide sales tax is different from the one the city has proposed. The state takes the money collected from the countywide tax and splits it between Sherman County, Goodland and Kanorado. If the new tax is approved in October, the city sales tax will not be split with the county or Kanorado. The money collected from the city sales tax will be used specifically to repair the city streets and major connecting highways to the city.

Adding the energy center to the mix made the need to get the sales tax in place a higher priority. The city commission stepped up and got the process moving. It will be up to the citizens of the city to approve the issue.

It will be important in the next few weeks for people to get answers to any questions about what the joint projects include. It will be up to the city and county commissioners to show how the road improvements will improve economic development opportunities for the whole county.

Repairing the major roads in the city and county have been a major goal for both commissions for several years, and raising the city sales tax is the most efficient method to begin repairing the roads. — Tom Betz



Blame game overshadows heroic efforts

There will be many heroic stories from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, but the rap is that help came too late.

There is a lot of finger-pointing, a lot of complaints. The recrimination will go on for years, obscuring a very real problem.

Let's face it: no nation is prepared for a disaster of this size.

Katrina may be the worst natural disaster in our history, certainly the most overwhelming since the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which may have killed around 2,500 and spawned a fire which leveled the city.

Yet the fire moved slowly, and most citizens were able to get out of the way. In New Orleans, those who stayed behind were stuck: no communications, no power, no water, no sewers, no food.

There will be a report. There will be a death count, probably in the thousands, easily surpassing San Francisco and New York on Sept. 11, 2002.

Who's to blame? An act of God, you might say, a hurricane bigger and stronger than most, aimed square at the most vulnerable city in the nation. Thousands fled during the evacuation, taking with them what they could. Too many stayed behind.

Like San Francisco, New Orleans withstood the initial shock. The next day, when two levees collapsed, floodwater inundated most of the central city.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Was help too slow in arriving? Even the president says so.

Was it George Bush's fault?

Is it true, as one black entertainer said on national television, that the president "doesn't care about black people?"

Come on.

Arrival of National Guard and Army convoys three days after the levy broke is not that bad, maybe a day later than it could have been.

The most vociferous finger pointing comes from the mayor and other city officials, whose job it was to be prepared for an emergency. The federal government is just supposed to come in and help.

But New Orleans was overwhelmed. The police force, fire department, emergency services, despite years of warnings, all were unprepared. All collapsed. And maybe, faced with a disaster of the same magnitude, that would have happened in any city.

In most cities, if there is a flood, the bulk of the town stays dry. You can base support and res-

cue efforts where the infrastructure remains.

Not in New Orleans.

That's the difference.

Could we face another such disaster? Would we be any more prepared?

Sure.

Imagine a terrorist attack with a "weapon of mass destruction" on New York, Washington or any other major city.

Imagine trying to evacuate New York. Or stop an unstoppable plague.

Imagine a massive earthquake along the New Madrid fault in Missouri, leveling both St. Louis and Memphis.

Would there be enough troops to pour in and help?

No, we have a lot to learn about disasters, man-made and natural. We could do a lot more to be ready.

The real answers, though, lie in planning and streamlining the bureaucracy, not in spending a lot of money preparing for what might happen.

We can't know what the next massive disaster will be, or when, or where.

But we can learn from this one.

And as the bodies stack up in those temporary morgues, God have mercy on their souls, we need to stop arguing and whining and start learning.

Even a day's improvement in the response would have meant a lot.

And it will the next time.

George Bush contributing to world poverty

By William N. Ryerson

President, Population Media Center

Apologists for the Bush Administration are making claims that rapid rates of population growth somehow stimulate consumerism and added demand that fuel economic growth.

Actually, the opposite is true. The economies of many developing countries are being crippled by the fact that a high percentage of personal and national income is spent on the immediate consumption needs of food, housing and clothing — because there are too many children depending on each working adult — leaving little available to form investment capital.

Lack of investment capital depresses growth of productivity of industry and leads to high unemployment (which is exacerbated by rapid growth in the numbers of people seeking non-existent jobs). Lack of capital also contributes to a country's inability to invest in environmental protection, education, government infrastructure and other areas that can contribute to the long-term productivity of the economy and living standards of the people.

Herman Daly, former senior economist at the World Bank, believes that this applies to developing countries worldwide. Simply put, if the assertions by the Bush Administration and other conservatives were true, the slow-population-growth countries of Europe and North America would have weak economies, while the economies of sub-Saharan Africa and the high-population-growth countries of Asia and Latin America would be robust.

The real measure of economic welfare is not gross national product or national income, but the median income on a per capita basis. Stimulating gross national product by having more and more people buying fewer and fewer necessities does not enhance economic welfare.



from other pens

• commentary

In the 20th century, no nation has made much progress in the transition from "developing" to "developed" status until it first brought its population growth down. In Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Bahamas and Barbados, rapid economic development occurred only after each country had achieved a rate of natural increase of its population below 1.5 percent per year and an average number of children per woman of 2.3 or less.

Worldwide, according to a comprehensive report by American author Bruce Sundquist, developing nations now require about \$1 trillion per year in new infrastructure development just to accommodate their population growth — a figure that is far from being met and is effectively impossible for these countries to generate. This explains why developed-world humanitarian aid and loans to developing nations of \$56 billion per year have been ineffective in improving their infrastructure and why the infrastructure of the developing world is sagging under the demands of the equivalent of a new Iraq every four months.

The 48 countries identified by the U.N. as "least developed" are expected to triple their population by 2050. As a whole, the developing world is struggling to make payments of \$270 billion per year on its \$2.5 trillion external debt — a debt that is increasing by another \$1 trillion every decade.

Massive rural-to-urban migration in developing countries is making the situation in large

cities increasingly desperate, with growing slums that lack basic sanitation and water, let alone schools. Projections over the next 30 years show that as many as four billion people may migrate from rural areas of developing countries either to join the one billion living in urban slums or emigrating to developed nations. This is a formula for increased political, social and economic instability worldwide.

The developing world is so capital-starved due to its high population growth rate that allocating some portion of government budgets to reproductive health care is difficult. Both developed and developing countries would need to triple their contributions to come close to what they committed to at the U.N. Population Conference in Cairo in 1994.

Meeting the entire need for family planning information and services of just \$15.2 billion per year for several decades could reap a long-term benefit of over \$1 trillion per year in reduced need for developing-world infrastructure growth and would enhance the health and welfare of people worldwide, while protecting the environment from further development. In the meantime, the Administration allocates less than 1 percent of the federal budget to humanitarian assistance for struggling countries. This stinginess not only hurts the people of the developing countries. Their poverty and suffering are major factors in the growing worldwide resentment toward the U.S. and its way of life.

William Ryerson is President of Population Media Center (www.populationmedia.org), a non-profit organization that uses specially created radio and television soap operas, to change behavior around the world with regard to family size, family planning, the status of women, avoidance of AIDS, and related issues. His email is ryerson@populationmedia.org.

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